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'Casa Grande & Senzala': Domestic Space and Class Conflict in *Casa grande* and *Que horas ela volta?*

By Tiago de Luca

Not long before Fernando Meirelles hit the international scene with his *Cidade de Deus*/*City of God* (2002) he had directed, with Nando Olival, *Domésticas, o filme*/*Maids* (2001). Given that Brazil has the largest population of maids in the world (eight per cent of its total workforce at the time), (Gallas) *Domésticas* had the merit of throwing light on an underrepresented profession, interweaving the stories of five maids living and working in São Paulo. Yet the film's realism turned out to be a flimsy affair, explicitly veering away from social conflict by erasing the maids' employers from view. As Luiz Zanin Oricchio points out, "[In *Domésticas*], the maids live in a world seemingly without bosses, that is, the opposing side is absent, which is an excellent recourse to avoid conflict" (176).[1] In fact, the film hardly ventures into the middle-class households it depicts, remaining in the domestic spaces in which the maids are often found, that is, the kitchen where they work and the adjoining 'maid's rooms' where they live. These spaces, it seems, condition the construction of subjectivities a priori, as all the maids in the film appear as flat stereotypes, rather than psychologically nuanced characters. In this respect, as Oricchio further notes, the film not only misses the opportunity to explore the contours of class struggle in Brazil, as it also fails to explore an universal theme that, from Jean Renoir's *La règle du jeu*/*Rules of the Game* (1939) through to the British TV sensation *Downton Abbey* (2010-15), has an illustrious audiovisual tradition: the relationship between "people separated from a social abyss living under the same roof" (172).[2]

Yet, in hindsight, it becomes clear that *Domésticas* was also a product of its time, when the foundations underpinning Brazil's abysmal social gap remained relatively unscathed. As Brazil made its way into the new millennium, class struggle could no longer be ignored and accordingly emerged as a favorite theme in the

country's cinematic production, as will be discussed in this chapter. Thanks to a booming economy, allied with governmental social programs aimed at reducing inequality, a group of over 30 million people entered the consumer market during president Lula's two terms in office, from 2003 to 2011. This represented not only the greatest redistribution of income and privilege in Brazilian history, with the middle class making up 52 per cent of the population (Pezzini), but also a seismic shift that shook the structures buttressing Brazil's social divide, which fueled class conflict.

Firstly, the marketplace, historically targeted at the upper- and middle-classes in the country (or A and B classes, as they are known in Brazil), had to come to terms with a new reality wherein the tastes and interests of lower middle-class consumers (the C class) now accounted for a sizable share of the market. Secondly, public spaces previously enjoyed only by the elites started to lose their exclusive status. As Alfredo Saad-Filho notes:

> For the first time, the poor could access education as well as income and bank loans. They proceeded to study, earn, and borrow, and to occupy spaces, literally, previously the preserve of the upper-middle class: airports, shopping malls, banks, private health facilities, and roads, with the latter clogged up by cheap cars purchased on seventy-two easy payments. (n. pag.)

And so it is that, according to a data poll carried out by Data Popular in 2010 as a response to complaints about crowded airports, Brazil's A and B classes had no qualms in hiding their discontent regarding this situation, with 48 per cent stating that "the quality of services [in the country] had worsened as access increased" and 50 per cent believing that "badly dressed people should not be allowed into certain places" (Cabral n. pag.).

Significantly, the places mentioned in the polls and widely heard in complaints about the "invasion" of Brazil's new middle-class—airports, highways, shopping malls—are those which French anthropologist Marc Augé has famously conceptualized as "non-places". These, notes Augé, are fleeting, public and anonymous "spaces of circulation, consumption and communication" that sit in contrast with "anthropological places", in which, conversely, "the most visible, the most institutionalized signs, those most recognized by the social order" can be glimpsed in terms of a "concrete and symbolic construction of space" (viii, 42). Yet

Brazil's "anthropological places" also had their foundations shaken as a result of social change, not least domestic spaces, where the long-standing tradition of having a cheap, often informally hired maid living in the back room became unsustainable. As the economy flourished, maids left domestic service to gain other skills and work in better-paid jobs in industry and shops; their wages became higher and, increasingly, their services hired by the day. This situation was ratified in April 2013, now during Dilma's presidency, when domestic work was finally formalized in Brazil with the promulgation of a constitutional amendment that regulated weekly working hours, minimum wage, social security and severance pay—all basic entitlements previously denied to a workforce that had historically survived largely within the informal market.

Although Brazil's success story has been dramatically interrupted, a situation that falls outside the scope of this chapter, a quick glance at the audiovisual content produced in the country in the last decade shows that the economic and societal changes mentioned above have not gone unnoticed. Whether consciously or unconsciously, class conflict emerged as a veritable theme in the country's cinematic and televisual production, with maids accordingly featuring as central characters. In fact, such was the ubiquity of this figure in 2012 that, as TV critic Mauricio Stycer noted, all *novelas* (soap operas) on air on Brazil's biggest broadcast network TV Globo had maids not in marginal supporting roles, as had been historically the case, but as the main protagonists. An unprecedented situation in the channel's history, and one that could not be overestimated given the genre's colossal popularity in the country, this trend evidenced Globo's efforts to cater to Brazil's emerging middle-class. Although without the typical escapist register of Brazilian TV soaps, maids and class conflict also proliferated in the cinema within a variety of modes and genres. *Trabalhar cansa*/*Hard Labor* (Marco Dutra and Juliana Rojas, 2011), for example, examines class tensions within an apartment in São Paulo while appropriating tropes associated with the horror genre. *O som ao redor/Neighbouring Sounds* (Kleber Mendonça Filho, 2012) similarly explores the relationship between bosses and servants in a middle-class neighborhood in Recife, while in *Doméstica*/*Housemaids* (Gabriel Mascaro, 2012), seven adolescents were asked to film their family housemaids for one week.

This chapter will specifically select two recent films that lend themselves to a meaningful comparison in terms of their reflection on a period of dramatic social

change in the country: *Casa grande/Casa Grande, or The Ballad of Poor Jean* (Fellipe Barbosa, 2014) and *Que horas ela volta?*/*The Second Mother* (Anna Muylaert, 2015). Although the former film takes place in Rio de Janeiro and the latter in São Paulo, they equally focus on an upper middle-class household and deploy comparable narrative and aesthetic strategies to convey class conflict. Similarly, as characters in both films refuse to stay in the spaces assigned by their social position, they throw into disarray the invisible relations governed by visible spatial sectioning, thus pointing to the ways in which subjectivities may be reinvented as spaces are crossed, contested and reappropriated.

Casa Grande

Barbosa's debut *Casa Grande* focuses on an upper middle-class family living in an affluent condominium in Rio de Janeiro. On the brink of bankruptcy, the family has to come to terms with the gradual disappearance of its privileges and servants. Partly autobiographical (Barbosa's affluent family also went bankrupt when he was a teenager), the film was conceived at the Sundance Screenwriter's and Director's Lab and premiered at the 2014 International Film Festival Rotterdam, receiving international acclaim thereafter.

The film lifts its title from Gilberto Freyre's *Casa grande & senzala* (*The Masters and the Slaves*), an essential, if controversial, book that alludes in its very title to the configuration that has historically defined domestic space in Brazil's slave-holding society, dating back from the first sugar plantations in the 1600s in the northeast: the *casa grande* (big or manor house) where the Portuguese master lived with his family and closer servants, and the adjoining *senzala* (the slave quarters). For Freyre, this spatial proximity explained the high degree of interbreeding between the two groups in Brazil, with masters allowing male and female slaves into the private space of their home and allegedly establishing a more humane relationship than the ones observed in other slave-holding societies. Of course, as many commentators have noted, Freyre's book put forward a somewhat rosy view on miscegenation that failed to account for the power relations subtending Brazilian slavery. Nevertheless, as Estela Vieira points out, his writings, "albeit controversial, do effectively disclose the architecture that sustains some of Brazil's social, economic and political traditions" (176). In particular, the book is essential reading for a deeper

understanding of the modern configuration of the country's upper- and middle-class household, whose ubiquitous "maid's room", a uniquely Brazilian architectural creation, can be directly harked back to the *senzala*, as alluded to by *Casa grande* and *Que horas ela volta?*. Let us look at the former film.

Casa Grande opens with a static long take showing the back garden of a three-story mansion entirely lit in the background. In the foreground, to the right of the frame, Hugo (Marcello Novaes) is inside a Jacuzzi, next to a swimming pool on the left. Hugo gets up, puts his robe on and makes his way to the house. Then, as he walks in, no longer in sight, the lights in the house are turned off sequentially in all three stories. With the house now in complete darkness, the room in the far right on the top (presumably Hugo's) is then lit up and the title of the film appears in big letters at the image's center. Cut. Inside the house, Hugo's son Jean (Thales Cavalcanti) leaves his room in the middle of the night and makes his way down to the house's garage and into the adjoining room where the cleaning maid Rita (Clarissa Pinheiro) lives. As they watch television on the sofa, Rita fills Jean in on her sexual adventures while rejecting his kisses advances. Cut. It is the morning of the next day, and the house's other two servants, the chauffer Severino (Gentil Cordeiro) and the black cook Noemia (Marília Coelho) wait outside the mansion until Rita let them both into the house.

These three consecutive scenes provide an instructive beginning to *Casa grande*. The opening long take, lasting exactly 3:12 minutes, lends visual form to the film's title (which is literally superimposed on the image) by preserving the actual duration needed to traverse the house's facilities, thus effectively conveying its superlative spatial dimensions. Yet as the following two scenes indicate, even though the *senzala* is absent from the title, and from view in the first shot, it will be a fundamental aesthetic and narrative device against which the upper middle-class is focalized in *Casa grande*. Although the film aligns its perspective to that of the 17-year old Jean, and to a lesser extent to his parents Hugo and Sônia (Suzana Pires), the rich in the film are depicted in terms of their relationship with, and reliance on, their servants. Visually, this is often expressed through a deep-focus spatial strategy by which the *casa grande* members are framed in the foreground, while the servants are seen engaged in domestic activities in the background. We see, for example, Sônia and her friend selling cosmetics sitting on the living room's sofa, with Rita visible as a mirror reflection behind them cleaning the house; Sônia teaching French to her

friend Lia (Georgiana Goés) on a veranda on the house's top floor while Severino cleans the pool beds down below; Sônia speaking with a lawyer at the kitchen table while Rita and Noemia cook behind them (Figure 1).

As the film unfolds, however, each of the servants disappears from sight. The first is Severino, the family's chauffer from Brazil's northeast who drives Jean to and from school every day. This daily time spent together, it seems, enables both characters to form bonds that go beyond their roles of employer and servant, with Jean asking Severino, not his father, for advice on how to seduce a woman. Yet Severino's job is the first to go as Hugo and Sônia struggle to manage their dwindling finances. The second is that of the saucy live-in housekeeper Rita, as Sônia finds pictures of the maid in sexy poses and naked all over the house, including Sônia's own bedroom. Rita's dismissal, in turn, leads the cook Noemia to resign: having accumulated the former's duties and receiving no pay from her employers for three months, she decides to work by the hour in another house in the same condominium.

Adopting a tragicomic tone, newcomer director and scriptwriter Barbosa furnishes this upper middle-class universe and its characters with perceptive touches that, though exaggerated for comic effect, will ring true for Brazilian viewers. An example is when Sônia is seen correcting Rita for mispronouncing Jean without a French accent, or when she claims, patronizingly, that she treated Rita like a daughter before firing her. The film's focus, however, is on Jean: as the family descends into economic hardship and has to deal with the gradual disappearance of servants in the house, the adolescent is forced out of his comfort zone and into spaces dissociated from his class position.

As Jean is gradually confronted with new social situations, the construction of his subjectivity undergoes a series of changes that will culminate in his liberation from the identitarian shackles of his class. Whereas his contact with the lower class was previously restricted to familiar and domestic places (such as the family's car and Rita's room), he is suddenly required to commute daily to his school by bus: a new environment in which his "rich face", as he is referred to in one scene, certainly stands out.[3] Not all is animosity, however, as the bus journeys also give Jean the opportunity to meet Luiza (Bruna Amaya). A stunning mixed-raced girl for whom he immediately falls, Luiza even manages to convince Jean to meet her in a *forró* house.[4]

Luiza's appearance also allows *Casa grande* to dig deeper into the complex question of race in Brazil, a topic the film had already broached through reference to

the contemporary bill that implemented a system of quotas based on racial background in the Brazilian federal university system. Yet the film confounds the viewer by having characters whose opinions on the topic may appear as surprising. Their subjectivities, it seems at first, are not predetermined by class affiliation and/or racial identity. Earlier in the film, for example, when the topic comes up at dinnertime, the otherwise conservative Hugo declares he agrees with the bill, reasoning that such "affirmative action", a term he pronounces in English, is also present in economic powerhouses like the United States—though he hastens to add that "in reality, really, the right thing to do would be to fix the problem at its bases, starting with the state schools". In the following scene, the topic is introduced for discussion in Jean's classroom and differing views are presented. One student remarks that the bill aims to address Brazil's "historical debt" with its "slave-holding past". Another student, of black ancestry himself (there are only two in the classroom), thinks that merit alone should count for university entry. Later in the film, during a barbecue at Jean's house, Luiza passionately defends the quota system, yet this time round Hugo has dropped his sympathy for it. Whether or not this is triggered by his hostility towards Luiza's firm opinions remains uncertain but he now boasts his achievements solely on the basis of merit and even disputes Luiza's racial identity as black, to which she discloses, to some guests' amusement, that her father is Japanese and her mother of black ancestry.

Unlike the first two scenes, this scene leaves no doubt as to where *Casa grande* stands in relation to the racial quota system, yet in order to do this the film has to sacrifice nuance and wit for a certain didacticism, as Luiza delivers a crafted, if contrived, speech on the history of racial injustice in the country. That said, the film cleverly exploits her striking physique in order to explore the question of miscegenation in Brazil. Luiza's unusual racial make-up, even if slightly implausible when checked against the actress' physical appearance (though Brazil does have the largest population of Japanese immigrants in the world living in São Paulo), encapsulates what Freyre defined as the "synthetic principle" animating Brazilian society, which entailed in his view "a democratization of interhuman relationships, of interpersonal relations, of relations between groups and between regions" (*The Master and the Slaves* xiv).

Such a democratization, however, has not translated into social and economic inclusion, since black and mixed-race Brazilians are much likelier to be poor, not to

mention the insidious racism still present in Brazil, questions from which *Casa grande* does not shy away—on the contrary. Thus, in the scene where Jean and his friends are driven home after a night out, one of the boys is ridiculed for spending his night with a black girl. Later in the film, Luiza confronts Jean by asking whether it was her skin color that made him think that she lives in a favela, as he (and the viewer) sees her getting off the bus next to a shantytown. Yet, in tune with the film's quest to confound the viewer, it turns out that Luiza does not live in the favela but in a middle-class apartment block facing it: we see the girl and Jean on her bed while a sprawling favela is visible through the window in the background (Figure 2).

This being a film set in Rio, it is worth noting that its favelas, one of the favorite locations in the country's cinematic history, are on view only through the windows of buses and apartments—though this is certainly in line with the film's aesthetic choice to frame class division from the perspective of Jean. On a visual level, moreover, the image mentioned above reinforces a formal dialectic between foreground and background, yet it does so in relation to the proximity of contrasting city spaces. Highly symbolic of Rio's social segregation, as the city's peculiar topography allowed the poor to live on the hillsides cutting across its upper- and middle-class quarters, the favela in the background not only reminds the viewer that this is indeed a "divided city".[5] It also brings into view that the *casa grande-e-senzala* spatial structure simply reproduces within domestic confines a geographical division that is materialized across the city in the form of *Mansions and Shanties*, to cite the title of another book by Freyre.[6]

In narrative terms, the fact that Jean is seen closer to a favela—even if the latter is literally framed by a window in a modest middle-class apartment—can be read as the midway point in the construction of his self, a coming-of-age journey which will be completed in the film's end with his arrival in the favela where Severino, Noêmia and Rita live. Jean finds out that Severino did not leave the job on his accord but that he was in reality fired. On finding the chauffer, Jean bursts into tears and learns with surprise (as probably does the viewer) that he in fact lives with Noêmia and her three daughters, the youngest one herself Severino's.[7] In this respect, it has been noted that one of *Casa grande*'s shortcomings is that the poor appear as thinly developed characters when set against the more nuanced rich ones, yet in my view this is one of the film's most original aesthetic and narrative choices.[8] Often visible only in the background and as tangential characters who dwindle in number as

the film unfolds, the fact that these servants reappear in the film's end in their hitherto unseen visibility while inhabiting their own space takes on added significance. Moreover, if these are characters whose subjectivities are not fully developed throughout the film, this is because the film refuses to leave Jean's side as a self-conscious strategy of focalization. His surprise at the fact that Severino and Noemia are married, live in the same house, and even have a daughter discloses his previous disinterest in the lives of people who had always been spatially close to him or in the background, yet never fully visible as subjects in their own right.

In Jean's coming-of-age story, then, the subjective and the social become inextricably intertwined: the formation of his self is mirrored by a growing awareness of his own class in the context of Brazil's inequalities and contradictions. Yet this does not mean that *Casa grande* adopts a moralist tone in its closure, as proved by its potentially controversial ending. As Jean runs into Rita in an improvised *forró* in the community, he approaches her with a newfound confidence. In the final shot, as Rita lies dormant naked in bed, Jean gets up at dawn, lights a cigarette, sits on the windowsill and takes in the sprawling favela before him. It could thus be argued that this ending symbolically reaffirms the power relations famously overlooked by Freyre in his account of the intersubjective encounters between masters and slaves, in the sense that Jean is finally able to seduce Rita, his former servant. This however would not do justice to the character of Rita, whose refreshing non-conformity to gender and class norms are highlighted from the very beginning. Rita is not only in full and proud control of her sexual agency as a woman, telling Jean of her adventures and preferences while rejecting his advances, but she also disobeys spatial demarcations by having her sensual poses photographed all over the house (by Jean?), thus upsetting the unspoken social contract informing class division, which results in her dismissal.

If anything, then, Jean's escape from the spaces and expectations associated with his class, as he ventures into a favela for the first time in his life, means that he has become the equal of Rita in their active construction of subjectivities that refuse to be spatially fixed or predetermined, an aspect that is visually underlined in the final shot. No longer in the eponymous *casa grande*, the stationary camera takes in Rita's humble flat in a composition that reinforces the film's use of depth of field as a means to comment on class disparity, though this time round, the first time in the film, it is the former servant who appears in the foreground and Jean in the background (Figure

3). In this light, their sexual encounter is perhaps more profitably understood not as power subjugation but as an affirmation of the ways in which subjectivities dictated through social position may be reinvented as spaces are reappropriated.

Que horas ela volta?

Que horas ela volta? is the fourth feature film of São Paulo-based director Anna Muylaert. Brazil's unsuccessful Oscar entry in the foreign-language category, this 2015 film has nonetheless made a notable international career, winning a special jury award for acting for its protagonists Regina Casé and Camila Márdila at Sundance, and the audience award in the Berlin Film Festival's Panorama section. Released one year after *Casa grande*, *Que horas ela volta?* shares a number of narrative features with the former. It depicts an upper middle-class family surrounded by servants and especially reliant on the housekeeper Val (Regina Casé), a northeastern migrant from the state of Pernambuco who, like Severino in *Casa Grande*, cannot resist a good *forró* on the weekends. The film equally features a male teenager, Fabinho (Michel Joelsas), about to enter university, unsuccessful at pulling girls and who has the habit of going into the maid's room in the middle of the night, though his tactile relationship with Val is of a maternal rather than sexual kind. If Fabinho, however, seems to nurture real feelings towards his "second mother", as per the film's English title, the same cannot be said of his real mother Bárbara (Karine Teles), whose affection towards Val often betrays a patronizing attitude. As in *Casa grande*, close spatial proximity does not necessarily translate into genuine interest or personal bond between employers and servants: Bárbara cannot even remember the name of Val's daughter, Jéssica (Camila Márdila), despite the fact that the maid has worked in the house for 13 years.

Yet *Que horas ela volta?* also differs from *Casa grande* in significant ways. The well-to-do, for example, are regrettably less multidimensional, with the haughty Bárbara, a fashion consultant who gets to be interviewed for TV in her own house, occasionally bordering a caricature. That said, if the upper middle-class characters are not as nuanced, this is also because *Que horas ela volta?*, unlike *Casa grande*, chooses to lavish most of its attention on the servants by aligning its perspective to Val's. This is illustrated in the scene in which the maid, uniformed and with a plate of canapés in hand, prepares to enter the living room where Bárbara's birthday party is taking place. Framing her at a close distance from behind, the camera smoothly tracks

Val as she leaves the kitchen, walks into the party and serves the guests. Although this is not strictly speaking Val's subjective perspective, by approximating the camera's gaze to hers, the viewer is made to put herself in Val's shoes as she zigzags through the crowd without ever being noticed or looked at. As a subject within this social milieu, Val is invisible.

Furthermore, by choosing to remain on Val's side, *Que horas ela volta?* reverses *Casa grande*'s framing strategy by having the rich family members as the backdrop against which the maid is depicted. This is what happens in the recurrent stationary shot, taken from inside the kitchen, in which Bárbara or her husband Carlos (Lourenço Mutarelli) can be glimpsed seated at the table in the dining room in the background through the kitchen's open door (Figure 4). This visual composition, coupled with off-screen diegetic sound, is often exploited for comic effect, since Val is seen on the left of the frame within the kitchen eavesdropping on the conversations taking place at the table in the background on the right (Figure 5). It is also freighted with symbolism not only because it conveys the clearly demarcated spatial separation between bosses and servants but also because it reinforces, through camerawork, Val's characterization as a subject without the possibility of social mobility. As the camera refuses to leave the kitchen and remains in place even when the maid leaves the frame to serve her bosses or collect the dishes (they never get up to do either of these things), it seems to echo Val's own fixed position, her "foot in the kitchen" so to speak:[9] any attempt to cross over to "the other side" of the house, as in the scene of Bárbara's birthday party, will effectively render her invisible.

However, these spatial boundaries and the regimes of (in)visibility and subjectivity they entail are thrown into disarray with the arrival of Jéssica, Val's estranged daughter who moves to São Paulo in order to apply for a competitive university. Surprised at the fact that Val lives with her bosses, Jéssica immediately dislikes the idea of sharing her mother's minuscule back room. On being given a tour of the house by Carlos, during which she chances upon an unused guest's room, Jéssica thus casually asks whether she could stay in that room. When invited by Carlos, who immediately falls for the girl, to have lunch with him in the dining room, Jéssica has also no qualms in accepting it, to her mother's incredulity. Yet it is Jéssica's partly accidental plunge into the swimming pool, as she is pushed by Fabinho, that sparks the most outrage and Bárbara's hostility, with the latter emptying the pool and sending Jéssica to her mother's room as a result. Then, as Jéssica is

caught spooning into "Fabinho's ice-cream", previously unspoken rules are finally spelled out: Bárbara prohibits Jéssica to stay in any of the interior premises, only "from the kitchen door to that side", causing the girl to leave the house.

As the outsider that brings conflict into the film and disrupts the status quo of the house, Jéssica has been taken by many to personify the "Lula years" in an allusion to the president's two terms in office, during which, as previously mentioned, millions of people in Brazil were able to move up the social ladder. In this respect, if Jéssica's reactions initially denote a slightly amused, if nonetheless genuine, unawareness of the seemingly colonial rules still informing class relations in an upper middle-class house in São Paulo, her growing realization that this is indeed the case makes her confront these rules through a subjectivity that boldly exceeds her class identity. As Paul Willemen writes:

> Subjectivity always exceeds identity, since identity formation consists of trying to pin 'us' to a specific, selected sub-set of the many diverse clusters of discourses we traverse in our lifetimes, and that stick to us to varying degrees. Subjectivity, then, relates to what we may think and feel to be the case regarding 'our' sexuality, kinship relations, our understanding of social-historical dynamics acquired through (self)education, work experience and so on (30-1).

Through her acquired awareness of the socio-historical dynamics animating Brazil's class system, Jéssica is the only character in the film that refuses to have her subjectivity conditioned by her identitarian class and pinned to certain spaces, much to the disbelief of her mother, for whom certain places, such as the pool or the dining room, should not even be "looked at" as they are simply "not for you".

Symptomatic in this respect is the fact that Jéssica wants to study architecture, which is a recurrent theme in the film. On arriving at Bárbara's house, Jéssica immediately recognizes it "as being a bit modernist, but not exactly". Later in the film, Carlos takes her to visit the famous Copan building, by Oscar Niemeyer, and then on to the modernist pavilion of the faculty of architecture and urbanism at the University of São Paulo. When interrogated as to why architecture, Jéssica replies that it is because she believes that "it is an instrument of social change", and although it is not entirely clear how she wants to achieve this, one telling shot in the film gives us a

glimpse of her attempt at making Val think spatially by highlighting her mother's own peripheral position within Bárbara's house. Looking at its architectural plant, Jéssica points at the *casa grande* on the right to then show how Val's house is entirely separated, being located "on the other side, on the lower floor" (Figure 6).[10]

Whether and to what extent Val's subjectivity changes as the film unfolds, though, is not entirely clear. Towards the end of the film, she does begin to question the house's spatial prohibitions and even enters the now half-empty pool, spurred by Jéssica's success at the university entry test. Speaking with her daughter with her mobile phone in one hand, and splashing the water around with the other, she cheekily confides her spatial transgression to Jéssica. Shortly after, as Fabinho decides to travel abroad as he himself failed the university entry test, Val realizes she needs to "spend some time with her daughter" and leaves Bárbara's house. Like *Casa grande*, *Que horas ela volta?* thus finishes in another part of town, leaving the upper middle-class neighborhood of Morumbi for the periphery. Now in Jéssica's humble flat, from which a favela is visible through the window, Val discloses another mischievous deed, producing out of her suitcase a coffee set that she had given to Bárbara and which she had been reprimanded for using during her boss's birthday party. Reunited, mother and daughter make plans for the future, including a massage course on which Val intends to enroll to become a masseur, and the decision to have Jéssica's own estranged baby brought to São Paulo from Pernambuco.

Leaving aside for a moment some plausibility issues that this happy ending raises, it is telling that Val never stands up for her daughter against Bárbara, not even when Jéssica is literally banned to enter the house. As the film's most emblematic image of Val's rebellion, moreover, the act of walking into a half-empty pool with the house empty could not be more timid in its symbolism and pales in comparison to Rita's transgressive "nudes" in *Casa grande*, for example. Not to mention that Val only decides to leave the house, it seems, when Fabinho decides to study abroad, which attenuates her own agency regarding this decision. As such, it is regrettable that her subjectivity is not allowed much room for change as the film unfolds, with *Que horas ela volta?* overtly avoiding conflict in its concluding section. The contrived and rushed happy ending struggles to hide its own implausibility precisely because the film has touched on so many wounds that are ultimately casually left aside. That said, this is still a film that offers a sharp insight into class relations in present-day Brazil

through the character of Jéssica, as she defiantly crosses boundaries and claims her own spaces in the world.

Conclusion

Upon the release of *Que horas ela volta?*, Regina Casé remarked that the film captured "a moment of change" in Brazil: the end of the era of the live-in cleaning maid.[11] At the moment of writing, however, most of the social and economic changes the country has witnessed in the last decade hang in uncertainty. In a dramatic reversal of fortune, Brazil's success story has given way, vertiginously, to economic recession and political crisis. Once the sign that the country was finally entering the ranks of the developed world, the domestic workforce's steadily decreasing numbers—from about eight per cent to below six per cent of Brazil's total workforce between 2007 and 2015 (Gallas)—have ceased to be the case, with many of the female workers returning to their former maid roles out of necessity. That said, both *Casa grande* and *Que horas ela volta?* should be interpreted as efforts to capture this "moment of change". As films that directly express and reflect Brazil's recent social experience, they shed light on a period of increasing tension between classes and might thus be profitably understood as conveying what Raymond Williams once termed "structures of feeling", which he defined as "that particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period" (131).

On an aesthetic level, furthermore, it is noteworthy that both films make use of the same spatial strategy in order to convey class conflict. They effectively deploy deep focus as a means of visually commenting on class and social disparity, thus calling to mind André Bazin's famous observations on depth of field, which allowed in his view a "representation of space" whose "necessary modality" of realism opened "to a universe of analogies, of metaphors, or… of correspondences" (190)—a universe he not coincidentally explored with reference to Renoir's use of this technique in *La règle du jeu.* Yet if the position of characters within the frame discloses the tension between masters and servants, and the rigid demarcations between them, *Casa grande* and *Que horas ela volta?* must also be understood, on a narrative level, in relation to characters whose subjectivities are unfettered by the spaces they inhabit and who consequently assert their own ways of being in the world as they cross over into new spaces. In so doing, both films, to cite Williams once

again, seem to define "a social experience which is still *in process*, often indeed not yet recognised as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, even isolating, but which in analysis […] has its emergent, connecting and dominant characteristics" (132). As the characters' active construction of subjectivities in the two films points to wider societal changes in the country, they thus provide a valuable insight into the "sense of a period" whose unpredictable and possibly explosive outcomes are yet to be fully revealed.

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[1] “[Em *Domésticas*], as domésticas vivem em um mundo aparentemente sem patrões, quer dizer, o lado contraditório está ausente, o que é excelente recurso para evitar conflitos.” All translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

[2] "A situação é potencialmente rica: pessoas separadas por um abismo social vivendo sob o mesmo teto".
[3] Jean is told he has '*cara de playboy*'. Though playboy can have the same English meaning, it is also used in other contexts in Brazil and can convey, as in the expression above, that someone has a privileged background.
[4] Jean had previously dismissed such a place to Severino earlier in the film, probably because of its association with the lower classes in Brazil's southeast, given the northeaster roots of this musical genre and its popularity among the migrant community.
[5] As per the title of Zuenir Ventura's book..
[6] See Freyre, *The Mansions and the Shanties*.
[7] This scene also stands out in the film in terms of its heightened documentary quality, as observed in the especially self-conscious and untrained, even awkward, manner in which some of the non-professional actors behave. This contributes to the sense that, much like Jean, the viewer has stepped into a noticeably different world.
[8] See Miranda for a critique of the film along these lines.
[9] "To have a foot in the kitchen" ("ter um pé na cozinha") is a pejorative expression in Brazil used to indicate someone has black ancestry, in a historical reference to domestic slavery.
[10] That said, as a film that has architecture as a recurrent theme and in which the house is the predominant setting, it is worth noting that the spatial organization of the house comes across as confusing. The main rooms are accessed to via a flight of stairs going down, though in one scene Edna has to climb a ladder outside to spy on Jéssica. Likewise, Bárbara's room is located atop the house as she is seen on a balcony overlooking the pool. There is one shot from the outside, when Jéssica leaves the house, that seems to indicate that the house has been constructed on a hill, though this is arguably not enough to clarify the architectural structure. I thank Lúcia Nagib for bringing this point to my attention.
[11] "Foi a percepção de um momento de mudança. Hoje em dia quase não tem mais a figura da empregada que dorme no emprego e que tem a casa dos patrões como sua." (Cimino)